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## THE TEACHING OF ENGLISH IN TECHNICAL HIGH SCHOOLS

KATHERINE LYONS

Technical High School, Fall River, Mass.

Dean Briggs says that there is no place like a college for visions and ideals. Most of the pupils in technical high schools do not expect to go to college, so that their ideals and visions must be obtained from high school, especially from their study of English and history.

The pupils in technical high schools may be divided into four main divisions: (1) those preparing for more advanced technical schools or for normal school, (2) those making the high school their last school, (3) those taking the business course, and (4) those in the clerical course. The first class differs but slightly from the college preparatory class in any high school and the course depends upon the demands of the technical institutes for which the pupils are preparing. As this class offers no real problem, it will not be considered in this paper. The second division offers one of the greatest of the problems of the high school. The third and fourth divisions will be combined here, for the English work is almost identical. As the clerical classes are made up almost entirely of girls, it is a good plan to put the clerical boys into the business divisions.

The technical pupils not preparing for higher schools represent the poorest material in the school. Their English is very crude, for they are generally very careless. They have few outside interests. They seldom read anything ex-

cept the newspapers. Much stress must be laid on their composition work, especially on oral composition. Get the pupils to talk and to write about the things they know how to do — how to make this or that thing which they have made in the shops. Find out the worst errors. Talk about these errors in class and decide upon penalties for the making of them in class. One teacher stopped the repeated use of *aint* in her class room by having the pupil who said *aint* and did not correct himself stay ten minutes after school. Such devices must be continually resorted to in order to keep up interest. As formal grammar does not interest the pupils, it is best taught incidentally whenever an opportunity arises. Neatness is often an absent virtue in this class. Only when all the teachers insist upon all the written work being neat can neat work be expected. Punctuation is generally considered unnecessary by the pupils. A story like the following will impress some of them:

A Prussian school inspector asked the burgomaster of a small town to visit some schools with him. The burgomaster was out of sorts and muttered to himself, "What is this donkey here again for?"

The inspector said nothing but set out with the unwilling burgomaster. At the first school he announced that he wished to see how well punctuation was taught.

"Oh never mind that," said the burgomaster. "We do not care for commas and such trifles."

But the inspector sent a boy to the blackboard and had him write, omitting quotation marks, *The burgomaster says, the inspector is a donkey.*

Then he ordered him to transpose the comma, placing it after burgomaster, and to insert another after inspector. The boy wrote, *The burgomaster, says the inspector, is a donkey.*

The burgomaster gained a new idea of the importance of commas.

The oral reading of themes, making noticeable pauses at punctuation marks, will bring out the necessity for correct punctuation and the fact that a clause is not a sentence.

The literature studied must deal with subjects in which the pupils are interested. Books dealing with industries of the day, inventions, and adventure attract the pupils. Most of the pupils know a great deal about what is going on in the world about them, so that reports, oral and written, on the lives and careers of prominent men and women of the present will interest them and will lead them to read biographies and magazines.

One must never forget that this division is made up chiefly of pupils who are in school simply because the law



requires them to be. They are looking forward to the time when they can leave school to go to work. Thus the English teacher must see that no one drops out because of discouragement. She will understand her pupils better if she visits the schools that the pupils have come from. After observing the teachers, the methods, and the work, she can connect the first year in high school to the grammar school so that the pupils will not feel as if they were in a strange land. The grammar schools must do their part also. Graduation requirements should be stricter. It is almost impossible for high-school teachers to work with pupils who have not learned their grammar school subjects,—pupils who can not find the subject of a simple sentence, nor tell a noun from a verb. These pupils are pushed into high school and are expected to be pushed through.

It is often hard for a teacher to understand the immaturity of the minds of some of these big boys and girls. She must be certain that, in asking a question in class or in making an assignment, her pupils know just what she means. She must take nothing for granted in a technical high school. A teacher was trying to bring out in "Tom Brown's School Days" the way in which Dr. Arnold adapted his sermon to the boys to whom he was speaking. Thinking that the pupils would not understand the word *adapt* and thinking that she was using an expression common to the pupils, she phrased her first question, "Did Dr. Arnold talk over the heads of the pupils?" Great was her surprise at the earnest answer, "No. He spoke from the pulpit."

In the clerical classes there are two decided sets of pupils. The first is made up of those pupils who are good, earnest workers and really want to be stenographers; the second is made up of those who are taking the clerical course because they heard someone say that the clerical course was easier than the technical course. The poorest of the technical pupils are interested in what they can do with their hands, but these pupils seem to be interested in very little. They are few in number and if there are but two or three in any one division, they may be encouraged to better work and spurred on through the influence of the other pupils in the class.

As the pupils in the clerical courses know that their value in the working world depends upon their ability to write and talk correctly, they will do drill work conscientiously. It is helpful to have a grammar review at the beginning of the

freshman year. A pamphlet used in the Fall River Technical High School gives the pupils ten rules in grammar. Although these rules do not include everything, familiarity with them and with the examples given, does improve in a noticeable manner the English of the pupils. One period spent on each rule with much practice in the application of it in correcting sentences, and frequent five-minute tests, make the pupil familiar with the application. None of the points taken up are new, yet many of the pupils seem unfamiliar with the work and it is very hard for them.

The pupils must realize that neatness is more important in their division than in any other. Spelling must be emphasized. Regular old-fashioned spelling lessons with a penalty of staying after school and writing the misspelled word ten or twenty times is effective. One way to correct a word commonly misspelled is to write the word on the blackboard, exaggerating the part commonly misspelled. For instance, to prevent *all right* from being written as one word with one *l*, exaggerate the second *l* making it twice as large as the first.

As commercial correspondence is taught as a separate subject in the third year, too much attention need not be paid to letter writing in the earlier years. The mechanical details can be taught by taking up the various kinds of letters. The friendly letter is most closely connected with the pupil, yet many of the pupils never write letters and are at a loss to find anything to write about, so suggestions must be offered. Instead of having the pupil write a composition on "How I Spent Labor Day," have the pupils write a letter to a friend telling him how Labor Day was spent. Ten minutes devoted to the explanation of the parts of the letter, the position and the punctuation of each, is generally sufficient preparation. Then follow short business letters, such as requests for catalogues, subscriptions to magazines, orders for books or athletic goods, and the like, — such letters as the pupil might write at any time. Following these may come the formal application for a position or a request for a letter of introduction. The teacher must see what the commercial department is doing and decide with it on a certain set of punctuation rules. The special vocabularies needed in business are generally acquired through the commercial correspondence course.

During the third and fourth years a good device for arousing interest and for testing the knowledge of the pupils is the use of old civil service examinations. As many



of the pupils intend to take these at some time, these trials bring home to them the practical value of English.

Current events form interesting subjects for composition. The little paper "Current Events" is interesting, yet there is a danger that the pupils will learn some short paragraph and present it as an oral composition, often using words, the meaning of which they do not know and talking about things which they do not understand.

Dictation is valuable in an English course, for it shows the particular weakness of the pupil in spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. It trains the ear as well as the eye. Clippings from newspapers which give tests in dictation given in different parts of the country, interest the pupils, for they like to see what they can do with such tests.

Newspapers and periodicals offer examples of the application of the rules studied. The Literary Digest and The Saturday Evening Post are good for study. Pupils are interested in finding applications of grammar rules, in studying paragraph and sentence structure, and particularly in noticing transitions, for they often think that modern writers never apply rules.

Though the purpose of the English course in a technical high school is to teach the pupils to read and speak correct English, yet the cultural value must also be kept in mind and we must try to show the pupils some of the beauties of literature.

Some of the books read in the classical high school cannot be taken up in the technical high school. The "Lady of the Lake" fails to interest. The "Idylls of the King" does not appeal to a class of boys, yet may be studied by a class of girls. Collections of short stories are interesting to all the pupils and if supplemented lead the pupils to become acquainted with other stories and other writers. The "Sketch Book" gives splendid opportunity for dictionary study. It is very helpful to take five or ten sentences from the "Sketch Book," underline the difficult words, and have the pupils substitute synonyms for the underlined words.

Thus the problem in a technical high school is not to find something which will take the place of the English course given in classical high schools, but to make over the English course so that it will appeal to a different type of pupil, keeping the parts that may be used to advantage, but casting aside those parts that are too difficult, and substituting something easier that can be connected with the life of the pupil.

## EDITORIAL NOTES

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Constant inquiries come to experienced teachers concerning the best way to handle the English work in our vocational and technical high schools. While it is important for us to remember that there is no essential difference between so-called *Business-English* and any other English, it is equally important to know that certain methods succeed in the classical courses that do not succeed in the technical, vocational, or commercial courses. Some practical suggestions in method are here offered by Miss Lyons of the Fall River Technical High School.

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COMPREHENSIVE EXAMINATIONS.

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All teachers who are concerned with the task of preparing pupils for college will be interested in learning that the College Entrance Examination Board will on June 19-24 hold, in addition to the older type of examinations, a set of *Comprehensive Examinations*. These examinations are designed for those who wish to enter Harvard, Yale, or Princeton by the Alternative or New Plan of Admission.

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THE CLARITY OF OUR DESIGN.

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While we all acknowledge that English instruction in the high school is more or less unsystematized we can find a good deal of solace in contrasting our own situation with that of other departments. A comparative study is possible in the pamphlet entitled *The Reorganization of Secondary Education*—Bulletin Number 551, issued by the United States Bureau of Education. This is a preliminary statement by the chairmen of committees of the commission of the National Education Association. We have in this report statements from various committees,—English, social studies, natural science, ancient languages, modern languages, household arts, manual arts, and music. The aims

and practices in few of these are so clearly perceived or so comprehensively expressed as they are in the case of English—and this notwithstanding the fact that we are constantly being assailed for our lack of definiteness. We commend the pamphlet to each English teacher.

*Palgrave's Golden Treasury.* Edited by Walter Barnes, A.M., State Normal School, Fairmount, W. Va. Row, Peterson and Company.

*Writing an Advertisement.* By S. Rowland Hall, with an introduction by Oscar C. Gallagher. Houghton, Mifflin Company.

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*Essay-Writing.* A guide to the practice of English Composition. By Guy Wendall, M.A., Form Master to Modern Sixth at Charterhouse. Longmans, Green & Co.

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